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IN OPPOSITION to SB 827 – Concerning Falconry
Submitted by Christine Cummings, Director
A Place Called Hope Raptor and Rehabilitation Center
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Dear Members of the Environment Committee;

We ask that you oppose SB 827 which would set a dangerous and harmful precedent by allowing falconers to take birds out of the wild and hunt on Sundays.

We offer our comments based on our expertise as raptor rehabilitators and environmental educators. A Place Called Hope Inc. specializes in the rescue and care of Connecticut s orphaned, injured or sick birds of prey. As federally licensed rehabilitators, we are taught the proper protocol for housing and caring for federally protected species. This includes veterinary care, weight management and of course, proper diet, in addition to utilizing rearing techniques which allow for successful release to the wild.

It is a complete misconception to say that falconry birds need to be flown to catch their own food. In captivity, rehabilitation centers feed their birds daily -- day old chicks, mice, rats and quail are some staples. Much of this diet consists of already dead items. A "live" diet is not required to care for a bird of prey in captivity, contrary to what the falconers are telling you.

The argument for hunting on Sundays as the only way these falconry birds will be able to eat is totally misleading. Hunting with a bird of prey may ideal but is not the only way to provide sustenance. A falconer is entirely responsible for providing the proper diet for their captive birds, just as we rehabilitators are, regardless of bonus free flying hunting opportunities they give the birds.

Senate Bill 827 would allow falconers to "take immature birds from the wild" which concerns us for multiple reasons. One, it is completely unnecessary since other options already exist for CT

falconers. Two, the mortality rate for these birds is already so high -- taking possible future generations to support the sport of falconry is unjustified and unethical.

Three, taking a juvenile bird from the wild would mean taking an inexperienced raptor from its natural learning arena and forcing it to "man a glove." It would mean taking the "wild" out of the bird and forcing it to become dependent on the handler for food. That is how falconry birds are trained to return to the glove. The use of food as a motivator is a strong and effective training technique.

This also means the bird must be kept hungry in order for it to be trained to get close to a potential predator, Man. Withholding food from an immature bird which has a higher nutritional requirement than an adult is not only cruel but negligent --- AND is not in keeping with the federal law on proper care.

Fourth, when it is stated that an immature bird may be taken, at what stage of life does this specifically refer to? Does this mean a falconer may take a juvenile from the nest? If so, has the DEP done any research to study the irreversible negative effects of imprinting?

Imprinting happens when a young bird's eyes focus on its caregiver. It is when they "imprint" the image of the caregiver into their identity so if a bird is raised by a human, it will believe that it too, is a human. This can be a dangerous and damaging condition to a young bird who will ultimately not be able to recognize its very own species, and may escape the falconer.

Since other options are already available to licensed Falconers, why then must we even consider allowing wild birds to be taken from their natural environment for ANY reason?

Keeping in mind that only a handful of spring nestlings survive through their first year, is it necessary to add to the percentage of failure by removing a bird that may have otherwise been the successful candidate for generations to come? Do we not owe it to the native wildlife of our state of Connecticut to continue to preserve and protect our environment and the wildlife within it to the best of our ability?

The bottom line is that taking a bird from the wild for any reason should remain illegal. This does not benefit the state of CT, its wildlife or the abducted bird of prey. This bill makes a mockery of the federal protection that these birds are supposed to have.

The rehabilitators and educators at A Place Called Hope heartily oppose Bill 827 and we ask you to oppose this ecologically destructive and ethically unsound bill.